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Gates' Gaffe

Robert Gates, director of the CIA, committed a major security violation earlier this year that could have cost the life of Jordan's King Hussein. The story was buried in secret CIA files, but PARADE has learned from insiders what happened.

Hussein—whose kingdom is stuck between Iraq and Israel—walks the tightest tightrope in the Middle East. To survive, he must placate both hostile neighbors and their allies.

To appease Iraq, the king closed his eyes to smugglers who supplied Saddam Hussein with various materials, in defiance of UN sanctions. And to keep our country on his side, Jordan's monarch allowed the CIA to use his nation as a spy base against Saddam Hussein. The CIA has intercepted Iraq's communications and monitored its military operations from Jordan.

Marist/Cosmos Liaison

CIA boss Robert Gates

The CIA was tolerant of Jordan's trade with Iraq. But Saddam is not tolerant—so Jordan's deal with the CIA was to be kept secret.

And it was—until last spring, when Robert Gates flew to the Middle East to explore ways to get rid of Saddam. The CIA director got impatient with the Egyptians and the Saudis, who kept complaining about King Hussein. The king had done more than any of them to oust Saddam, Gates blurted out.

Gates' remarks quickly got back to the Iraqi leader, who apparently interpreted them to mean that King Hussein had been helping to organize a coup against him. Saddam—who has been known to order assassinations—responded with angry threats. The King of Jordan took them seriously.